Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2011

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Sticky Everlastings - *Xerochrysum viscosum*

Photo - Noel Young

PRESIDENTS REPORT FOR 2010

An interesting and varied range of topics from our guest speakers enlightened both members and visitors at the Friday night meetings last year - from bird-life, amphibians of distant lands, to some of our local and perhaps little known, highly skilled honey suppliers.

Our thanks are due to the previous committee who in 2009 put together a varied list of enthralling topics. Local retired landcare advocate Ian O'Halloran did the first talk and field trip. Peter Marriott, a published author on moths, showed us some of our little-known night life denizens - he enjoyed himself later that Friday evening collecting photos on a bush block and managed to capture a moth not previously known to be in Victoria, a *Halone servilis.*

And so the interest and learning progressed. One could enthuse all night on just the speakers. The newsletter editor commented that he had been concerned he might fall asleep but found himself kept thoroughly awake by the fascinating address on Grevilleas by Neil Marriott.

FIELD TRIPS

Inclement weather may have curtailed some excursions last year but this previously rare commodity provided a bounty of exquisite native flowers, some of them not seen for decades. Fungi of all shapes and colours sprouted well into summer. Orchids such as the Scented Leek Orchid, *Prasophyllum affin odoratum*, the Great Sun Orchid, *Thelymitra aristata*, the Bearded Greenhood, *Pterostylis plumosa*, were found in large groups in some areas - just to name a few. A photographer's smorgasbord.

On the subject of photos, that brings me to our newsletter editor, Noel Young, who gave the members an impeccably presented and well produced monthly newsletter - fitting together, with some regard to budget costs (or our treasurer) articles supplied by Castlemaine Field Nats members and adding his finishing touches when needed with his excellent stories and photos. No small task to elicit regular material from sometimes reluctant contributors. Many thanks to those who came up with the goods.

BROCHURE LAUNCH

Dwelling on paperwork and a milestone in Castlemaine Field Nats history, in 2008-09, a dedicated and astute sub-committee, under the instigation of Richard Piesse, put together an outstanding publication - pocket sized and water resistant - of our local indigenous plants. This was launched in July by honoured guest and respected naturalist, ex-Governor John Landy, AC, CVO, MBE. This useful and clear brochure was warmly received by members and the public alike. The project was supported by the Norman Wettenhall Foundation, Mt Alexander Shire Council, Connecting Country, Friends of Box Ironbark Forests, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the North Central CMA.

I heard the hardest part of the project was selecting and limiting from the range of excellent photos from the local photo gurus. It is hoped that a future, second printing will encompass many photos not yet used.

COMMITTEE

Without the expertise and gentle guidance of some longstanding and patient committee members, along with the Secretary who locks it all together, the President's job would be an impossible position to take on. Our thanks go to the previous President, Natalie de Maccus, for her dedicated stint at the helm.

Combined, their knowledge of plants, insects, birds and interesting localities for Wednesday afternoon wildflower walks and field trips held on Saturdays, gave young and old a sense of belonging and learning which one could not put a price on. Thank you to all, particularly Rita for her vast knowledge and enthusiasm.

ROADSIDE CLEANUPS

Thank you to outgoing committee member Hans van Gemert, who had previously organized the arduous task of safety and group numbers, and removal of the large volume of litter spread on either side of the Pyrenees Highway four times a year. This job is now in the capable hands of Geoff Harris, who supplies both his four wheel drive ute and his patience in dealing with bureaucracies. This work is not a welcome community task but has the benefit of some beautiful wildflowers in season.

BIRD COUNT CHALLENGE

Chris Morris has sorted out the respective groups, recording sheets and car pooling required to cover a large rural area surrounding Castlemaine once a year to ascertain bird species and counts for Birds Australia. Records are indicating that both native and feral bird populations over Australia are declining in some areas. Sadly, it appears man's progress is steadily harming many species in our countryside.

WEB PAGE

As well as contributing some highly researched and informative articles to our newsletters, Chris Timewell has been upgrading our website this year, with help from Noel Young.

REPORTING

Our public officer and treasurer, Nigel Harland, can not only count beans but has dealt calmly with the reporting requirements of being an incorporated body. He will deliver the financial report to you this evening.

SUPPER

Helen Morris has taken over the voluntary job of supper organization at general meetings. Sadly, a lovely ex - committee member and supper organizer, Maggie Oliver, passed away in November 2010. She had also held the position of Secretary and George Broadway recognized her contribution at our December general meeting. Phee Broadway described Maggie as a very keen birdwatcher, rarely leaving home without binoculars and bird book - and a thermos of tea.

AUSTRALIA DAY AWARD

Congratulations to Ern and Lesley Perkins for their Service to the Community award at the Australia Day ceremony in Victory Park for their decades of work dedicated to the care of the local environment and for sharing their freely given knowledge. They were nominated by Castlemaine Landcare Group, one of the many groups benefiting from their contribution.

SWIFT PARROTS

Another Castlemaine Field Nats member - Debbie Worland - has been quietly working in the outreaches of Castlemaine for many years and has produced a DVD, "*the Swift Parrots of Muckleford - a nationally endangered species*" through the assistance of the Norman Wettenhall Foundation and the Melliodora Fund. Chris Tzaros from Birds Australia will launch the DVD on Thursday, February 24th, at 10.30am at the Castlemaine Market Building. Congratulations, Debbie.

I would finally like to thank once again all the members of the committee and all those behind the scenes workers like Natasha Harris for newsletter postings, and the car pool drivers and walk leaders. Well done, and all the best for 2011.

Denis Hurley, PRESIDENT

Reminders

Subscriptions are due.

If you haven't taken care of this already, please send the form and remittance to:

The Treasurer, CFNC Inc., P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450

Committee vacancy – can you help?

As a consequence of the departure of a valued Committee member, (Richard Piesse) there is a vacancy on the committee. If you are interested please contact Denis or George.

Launch of "The Swift Parrots of Muckleford" DVD.

The official launch of Debbie Worland's remarkable movie on the plight of the endangered Swift Parrot took place on Thursday February 24 in the Castlemaine Market Building with an audience of 40 to 50 in attendance.

After an introduction from Beth Mellick of the Norman Wettenhall Foundation (who organized a grant for the production of the DVD from the Melliodora Fund), Debbie outlined the evolution of the project and the people involved in it, explaining how her "obsession" with this appealing parrot came about, and how she recorded their behaviour with her video camera over a five year period.

Birds Australia's Swift Parrot Recovery Co-coordinator Chris Tzaros then gave a short talk on the life cycle of the Swift Parrot and what is known of its migratory movements. He showed slides of the annual mainland distribution as reported by observers, which clearly indicate that the birds primarily follow and depend on the flowering of the eucalypts. These maps and other comments from Chris are incorporated in the DVD. The maps also show that the favourite over-wintering area in Victoria is centred on Muckleford, so the people of Mt Alexander Shire should have a special interest in the fate of this rare species.

Debbie Worland, with producer Bill Irwin, Beth Mellick (Norman Wettenhall Foundation), and Chris Tzaros (Birds Australia)

- article and photos by Noel Young

Part of the DVD was then screened to great appreciation from the attendees, and this was followed by morning tea. Further information on the project is available on the website www.swiftparrotsofmuckleforddvd.com

Copies of the DVD can be purchased at the Information Centre, Market building.

This beautiful Australian parrot is on the Nationally Endangered Species List, with only 1200 breeding pairs left in the wild. The Swift Parrot breeds only in Tasmania and each year travels to the Australian mainland to feed over the winter period. One of their favorite spots is The Box Ironbark Forests of Central Victoria.

Photo by Debbie Worland

Bells Swamp excursion February 12

Noel Young

Despite the 8.30 am start, there was a good roll-up of members for the trip through Maldon and along the Bridgewater road. Bells Swamp was easy to find, as it covered the road for some distance with about a foot of water. Without getting our feet wet we could only observe from the eastern end of the flooded stretch of road, but those who made the trip were certainly not disappointed, as we steadily compiled a list of 35 bird species.

Highlights for the morning included the sighting of a lone Pink-eared Duck, which seemed to have joined a small group of Black Ducks as preferred company. Then we watched a group of four Musk Ducks swim up and down for some time, their dark profiles low in the water. A number of the more common water birds were present, but our list was swelled by the abundance of bush birds attracted by the many mature Eucalypts in and around the swamp.

Just before leaving, a passerine perching on the side of a tree caused some debate. After consulting the field guides, we concluded that it was a White-winged Triller, either a female or a young male in non breeding plumage.

Bells Swamp list

Pacific Black Duck	Wood Duck	Australasian Coot	Dusky Moorhen
Grey Teal	Chestnut Teal	Pink-eared Duck	Musk Duck
Australasian Grebe	Hoary-headed Grebe	White Ibis	White-eyed Duck
White-faced Heron	Little Pied Cormorant	Wedge-tailed Eagle	Welcome Swallow
Tree Martin	Fairy Martin	Masked Lapwing	Magpie-lark
Magpie	Raven sp	Fuscous Honeyeater	White plumed H'eater
Red Wattlebird	Brown Treecreeper	Willy Wagtail	Superb Blue Wren
White-winged Triller	Black f Cuckoo-shrike	Crested Pigeon	Long-billed Corella
Galah	Lorikeet sp	Red-rumped Parrot	

Roadside Cleanup

Please come along if you can and assist in the KABC roadside clean-up on Saturday 19th March. Our section is between McKenzies Hill and the Steiner school. Note that KABC rules prohibit anyone under 16 from working on the roadside. Sturdy footwear and gloves are advisable. Reflective vests and garbage bags will be supplied.

Chris Timewell and Geraldine Harris at the last cleanup on 25th September 2010 photo Denis Hurley

Geraldine Harris re photos shown at the last club meeting -

Suzanne Murdoch took these photos and has now identified them as Gum Snout Moth (*Entometa fervens*) larvae and moth, from the family Lasiocampidae. The larvae are long and covered in short fine hairs with longer hairs at the side to make the flattened larvae look like part of the branchlet it is resting on. The larvae have the membrane between the segments of their thorax coloured in black and blue, and when they are disturbed they rear up exposing this coloured skin. The second photo is probably a female moth.

Orchard Butterfly Caterpillars
Tony Morton

These photos were sent me by Marion Cooke, who lives on the Yapeen/Muckleford road. They are caterpillars of the Orchard Butterfly *Papilio aegeus*, feeding on citrus. It is most unusual, but not unknown, for them to breed in Central Victoria, though with the spreading of citrus orchards along the Murray they sometimes occur even as far West as Adelaide. It is splendid to see this tropical butterfly actually breeding here, even if only for this extraordinary year! Members will no doubt have seen its cousin, the Dingy or Dainty Swallowtail *Papilio anactus*, also lured down from tropical climes by the availability of citrus. It is quite common this year, but is not as noticeable as *aegeus* which flies in a fast and commanding way, as befits its royal name!

Observations

- Natalie reported that Orange Chats have been observed in the area
- Kit Morris remarked on New Holland Honeyeaters in large numbers locally, and the abundance of Damsel-flies and Dragonflies generally.
- Geoff Harris has seen lots of Praying Mantis around home.
- One early morning Denis Hurley witnessed a young fox gambolling about in the yard for about 10 minutes. He has also seen a Speckled Warbler, Eastern Spinebill, Silvereyes and a flock of Brown-headed Honeyeaters feeding on the Eremophilas every day. He has also seen Magpies attacking a Brown Goshawk which was feeding on the ground
- Chris Timewell has identified three species of frog around his Saint St home – the Spotted Marsh Frog, Southern Brown Tree Frog, and Plains Froglet
- George Broadway noticed a Cootamundra in Farnsworth st, virtually defoliated by caterpillars, with hundreds of butterflies swarming around

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
March 2011

Fri March 11 meeting: speaker: JULIAN HOLLIS on local geology

Sat March 12 field trip: local geological features with Julian Hollis*

*NB meet at **9 AM** at the Duke St car park

Sat March 19 activity: KABC roadside clean-up **9am** at cnr Pyrenees Highway and Golf Links Road

Fri April 11 meeting: speaker: DEBBIE WORLAND Swift Parrots

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.
Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Denis Hurley's; 20 Merrifield St., at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2011
Ordinary membership: Single $27, Family $35
Pensioner or student: Single $24, Family $29
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2011 Committee

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